

**This week, the House passed two major measures aimed at helping American workers and small businesses: the Small Business Contracting Program Improvements Act (H.R. 3867) and the Trade and Globalization Assistance Act (H.R. 3920).**

The Small Business Contracting Program Improvements Act makes critical changes to the Small Business Administration's federal contracting programs that will open up new opportunities for small businesses, in particular veteran-, women-, and minority-owned firms.

Small businesses are the backbone of our economy, generating more new jobs and making significant contributions to Maryland's economic health and viability. They represent more than 99 percent of all employers, creating half of the nation's gross domestic product, and up to 80 percent of the new jobs nationwide.

Maryland has an estimated total of 536,200 small businesses, employing approximately 53 percent of the state's non-farm private labor force. Thirty-one percent of the state's small businesses are owned by women and 21 percent are minority-owned. In FY '07, small businesses in the State of Maryland procured over \$17 billion in federal contract dollars.

Anything we can do to create an environment for our small businesses to thrive and grow is good policy. The Small Business bill will lower barriers to working with the federal government, ensure broader participation, create greater economic opportunity, and provide the best value for taxpayers' dollars.

Overall, this legislation focuses on expanding opportunities for veteran, women and minority entrepreneurs. Under the bill, veteran-owned businesses will receive significant assistance in competing for and obtaining federal contracts. Additionally, the bill modernizes the 8(a) program, a critical initiative aimed at the development of minority-owned firms. Finally, to help level the playing field for women business owners, the bill ensures the overdue implementation of the Women's Procurement Program.

The second bill strengthens and improves services available through the Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) program to workers who have lost their jobs or have been displaced as a result of increased imports

or shifts in production out of the United States.

When TAA was established in 1962, it represented a commitment to ensure the viability of American workers adversely affected by international trade. Since then, the U.S. economy has changed dramatically, growing from a largely domestic, manufacturing-based economy to one that is rapidly evolving and globally interdependent.

While the new global marketplace has significantly expanded opportunities for trade and economic expansion, it also has caused the displacement of many American workers. Certainly one of the greater economic challenges of our time is managing the benefits of trade while addressing the negative consequences that it has had on American workers and communities.

The TAA bill represents an important investment in workers and communities that have been hardest hit by today's global economy. To match the realities of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century economy, the bill significantly improves job training services and TAA health benefits so that displaced workers can manage their health care costs while strengthening their skills to reenter the workforce.

It also extends critical TAA benefits to service industry workers and closes loopholes in current law to ensure all manufacturing workers who have lost their job due to outsourcing qualify for TAA. Additionally, the bill creates new benefits and tax incentives for industries and communities directly impacted by manufacturing job losses, and it increases the notification cut-off for plant closures and mass layoffs from 60 to 90 days.

In the dynamic open-market economy of the 21

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Century, we must have an economic agenda that provides a chance for prosperity for all Americans, not just the privileged few. These two pieces of legislation – the TAA workers assistance bill and the Small Business Contracting Improvements Act – are designed create and strengthen opportunities for American workers and small businesses.

From strengthening TAA and expanding opportunities for small business to passing an Innovation Agenda and raising the minimum wage, this Congress had made a commitment to ensuring that a rising economy lifts all boats by giving workers and businesses the tools they need to compete and thrive in today's global marketplace.

For more information about federal contracting opportunities for small businesses, visit the Small Business Administration's Website at [www.sba.gov/services/contractingopportunities](http://www.sba.gov/services/contractingopportunities) or call the SBA Answer Desk at 1-800-U-ASK-SBA (1-800-827-5722).

If you are a worker who has lost your job as a result of trade and believe you may qualify for TAA, more information can be found at [www.doleta.gov/tradeact](http://www.doleta.gov/tradeact) or at 202-693-3560.